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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: MONK-BASED JHU INSISTS GSL SHOULD SEEK
TO CRUSH LTTE

REF: COLOMBO 188

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 2, Ambassador met with several members of the Buddhist monk-based Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), including newly appointed environment minister Champika Ranawaka (reftel). JHU representatives said the government should crush the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) through military means. The JHU representatives offered a revisionist take on Sri Lanka's ethnic history, positing that the Tamils have no roots in the north and east.

The JHU acknowledged a need for dialogue on the ethnic issue, but said since the LTTE does not adequately represent the Tamils, it would be vital for the government to restore democracy to LTTE-controlled areas before a meaningful discussion could occur. The Ambassador reiterated the U.S. stance that a negotiated settlement that meets the needs of the Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim communities would provide the only lasting solution to the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka. The Ambassador noted that the U.S. continues to stand with Sri Lanka in its fight against terrorism, but believes a military solution is neither viable nor desirable. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On February 2, the Ambassador met with three Buddhist monks and five laypersons of the Buddhist monk-based Jathika Hela Urumaya (JHU), including newly appointed Environment Minister Champika Ranawaka. The JHU characterized the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) as a small group that has taken up arms in "a conspiracy to destroy the culture" of Sinhalese Buddhism. One monk who had studied archaeology theorized that Tamils have no claim to an indigenous homeland in Sri Lanka's north or east because the Sinhalese established the entire country and maintained kingdoms throughout the island.

¶3. (SBU) One JHU interlocutor said it is the party's "theoretical policy that there is no ethnic conflict." He said the Tamils were over-privileged during British colonial rule, and many Tamils resented the Sinhalese "taking their rightful place as the majority" at Sri Lanka's independence. He stated that the Tamils founded the first race-based

political party, positing that now the vast majority of Tamils would rather live in the Sinhalese south than in LTTE-controlled territories in the north and east. (In fact, approximately 52 percent of Sri Lanka's Tamil population lives in government-controlled areas.)

¶4. (SBU) JHU representatives said the government must "militarily crush" the Tigers in order to restore democracy to the north and east and offer Tamils a genuine voice. Several JHU members criticized the Tigers for terrorist tactics, drug trafficking and other unlawful activities, killing moderate Tamils, and claiming to represent the whole Tamil community despite lacking legal standing. Udaya Gammanpila, a JHU lawyer, said he did not know of any Tamil grievances against the government, but if Tamils, speaking for themselves and not through the LTTE or one of its proxies, raised such issues, his party would welcome the dialogue.

¶5. (SBU) The Ambassador reiterated that the US has proscribed the LTTE as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, made law enforcement efforts to limit Tiger activities, and supports the Sri Lankan government's right to defend itself against terrorist activity. The Ambassador added, however, that the US does not believe a military solution is either viable or desirable, and urged the JHU to support a peaceful, negotiated settlement. Party officials responded that six sets of negotiations with the Tigers over the last twenty years have not yielded peace in Sri Lanka, and the government must eliminate the LTTE. Nevertheless, they conceded, the JHU's November 2005 electoral pact with President Rajapaksa outlines some measures to open talks with the LTTE, which the

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JHU will continue to support.

¶6. (SBU) COMMENT: The JHU's focus on the Sinhalese Buddhist version of Sri Lankan history and the accusation that the LTTE is trying to undermine the nation's "culture" typifies its chauvinist stance: it claims to permit tolerance for minorities but makes no actual concessions to address minority rights or protections. While the JHU is certainly correct that the LTTE does not speak for all Tamils, it is a bridge too far for us to follow its logic to the conclusion that therefore "there is no ethnic conflict." Many Sri Lankan Tamils who abhor the LTTE nevertheless feel deeply disenfranchised and poorly served by a government which they believe does not recognize, let alone address, their concerns about language rights and human rights violations. The JHU's new ministerial post only offers the party one voice in a cabinet of 55, but the party's allies and supporters in the larger Sinhalese community will continue to try to throw a monkey wrench into efforts to develop a "southern consensus" on a resolution to the ethnic conflict.

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